

PodMag August 2017

Karen Foley:

Hi and welcome to the PodMag the audio news magazine from the Faculty of Arts & Social Science at the Open University.

I'm Karen Foley and in this August edition we take a look at three more new modules that will be available this autumn. If you haven't already registered there is still time to do so but do it soon because registration closes on 14th September.

The first of the modules that we focus on is A277 Exploring Religion. And Paul-Francois Tremlett told me all about it.

So Paul, tell us about your new module.

Paul-Francois Tremlett:

Our new module is A227. It's a new second level module replacing A217. It's called Exploring Religion. And we've got a couple of really interesting aspects to the module in terms of curriculum, you know, the content of the module and some of the pedagogy that goes with it through which we're hoping to sort of enhance students enjoyment and experience of their learning.

Karen Foley:

The previous module that you did was very much a religious studies 101 type thing. How is this then different?

Paul-Francois Tremlett:

That's right, the previous module was introducing you to discrete religious traditions and then you'd learn them in terms of core beliefs and practices and so forth. In this module what we're focusing on is what we're calling 'lived religion'. And so the focus is less on traditions as kind of complete but also somewhat abstract systems of belief and practice. The focus in A227 is on how ordinary people are living out their religion in complex cultural, social, political and economic contexts.

There are still historical dimensions as well as contemporary material but it's much more focused on what people are really doing in their individual and daily lives.

Karen Foley:

And it's very interdisciplinary I mean even from the way you're talking about things the religious component is one of many factors that you're exploring including sociology, history, anthropology, etc. This would obviously appeal to students who wanted to study religious studies but what about other students who may be doing an open degree who may be interested in those other aspects? Why would this module appeal to them?

Paul-Francois Tremlett:

Well I think what this module has got is firstly in terms of the kinds of disciplinary skills that we're developing through the course of the module. I think students with a background in history or sociology or politics could conceivably be interested in this

module precisely because we look at religion, for example, in colonial situations. We look at religion in terms of its political weights and burdens if you like. And we're also looking because for us religion is always social and cultural I think students with a background in sociology or history are also going to find a lot of what we're encouraging them to do very exciting.

Karen Foley:

Now you've put together some very innovative module material for this. Can you just give us one example of something that you're particularly proud of?

Paul-Francois Tremlett:

I'm going to talk about units that I wrote because I know those better. I wrote one unit called liquid religion. It belongs in the first block, the first block is about places. And liquid religion is about religion in the Philippines during the Spanish Colonial period and up to the present.

And what the unit does is it takes the student through a journey of colonialism and Christianisation of local Filipino populations by the Spanish Colonial authorities. But at the same time telling that story of Filipino religious innovation where Filipinos are adapting the Christianity that is initially imposed on them. And then creatively reworking it in terms of their pre-existing culture and developing new ideas, new practices and essentially new religions. And right the way through to the present day.

Another unit I wrote was about cargo cult. Again it's about religion in colonial and also heavily racialised and politicised situations but also it's about the creativity of local populations working with missionary Christianity and then turning it in to something new and innovative and creative.

Karen Foley:

It sounds like a fascinating module Paul, thank you for telling us.

Paul-Francois Tremlett:

Thanks a lot.

Karen Foley:

Next, we take a look at A329, the Making of Welsh History and Richard Marsden told me why it's great preparation for postgraduate study for history and classic students.

Richard can you fill us in on A329? What is the module about and who's going to be studying it?

Richard Marsden:

Certainly Karen. A329 is the Making of Welsh History. So what the module does is it covers a 1000 years of Welsh history from the medieval period to the modern age. But it also acts as a way of enabling students to study a whole set of much broader themes through the kind of case study in Welsh history. That includes things like medieval conflict, with the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, modern protest movements and the development of kind of modern nationalism.

Karen Foley:

And students studying this will of course be from may be a classics or a history background. What's interesting though is despite this cramming in of a 1000 years of Welsh history to the first part of the module, the second part involves a dissertation which is very exciting. Can you tell us about that?

Richard Marsden:

Yeah, absolutely. Well as you say the first 18 weeks of the course will be learning about Welsh history and about some of the themes I've just described and then the second half students will be able to do their own dissertation. And that means that a 6000 word piece of historical research where students will pick their own question and their own research area. And then they will be responsible with support from their tutor for going off, researching that and producing a piece of historical scholarship on an area that they've chosen.

Karen Foley:

And what a fantastic and unique opportunity for students who are thinking about doing an MA. Tell us how this is structured so that they get a good experience of what doing a dissertation involves.

Richard Marsden:

This module is an end in itself because doing a dissertation is a great thing for any history or classic student to do but it's also intended if students are interested in going on to an MA in history or classics to set them up for that.

So the first couple of TMAs are kind of standard history type essays, history, classic type essays. But the third and fourth TMAs relate to the dissertation directly. So the third TMA is a research proposal where students will talk about the kind of questions they want to ask about their topic and the sources they're going to use and then the fourth TMA relates to the first chapter of the dissertation. And the nice thing about that is that all the way through students will be able to get feedback from their tutor as they go through those stages. And that's why we've set the assessment up in that way.

Karen Foley:

Now the other unique opportunity that students will have but again is really invaluable if you're thinking about going on to further study is the opportunity to work collaboratively. Can you tell us how you've done that and why it's so important?

Richard Marsden:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Well, you know, we think this is really important, when I say we I mean the module team. We think this is really important because if you go on to postgraduate study you'll find that you'll be working quite closely with other students, bouncing ideas off one another. So that's something that we've tried to do on A329, tried to put in on A329.

So that means that there are lots of activities just like on normal OU modules, the difference on A329 is you're not going to be doing them on your own, you're going to be doing them online with other students. So you'll see how other students respond to them and you'll be able to discuss the issues that come out of that.

And then when it comes to the assignments students will also be looking at each other's work and offering constructive comments on that. I should stress that this isn't kind of group assessment, there's no group marks, all your work will be individual and all your marks will be individual. The difference is that you'll be also given the opportunity to kind of get feedback, not just from your tutor but from other students who are on the journey as you are.

Karen Foley:

And if people are doing dissertations that they're selecting the subject area for I guess they're going to be sharing a lot of useful advice. So it's almost like students helping students. They might suggest things that way for it. Is that the kind of way it would work?

Richard Marsden:

Yeah, absolutely. So the idea here is that, you know, many heads are better than one. So, you know, we might have activities, well we will have activities where, you know, each student will be asked to, you know, read and summarise a different article or a different chapter. And then they'll put that all on a repository online. And what you'll get at the end of that is a great resource where there's 20 or 30 or 40 different summaries of different chapters that students can look at but they've only had to read one themselves.

So it's that kind of multiplier effect that we're going for.

Karen Foley:

Excellent. And I guess you'd also learn a lot about seeing how other students have tackled those as well as the content.

Richard Marsden:

Yeah, exactly. So a lot of this is about sharing skills and developing and approaches. So what you could do is you can look at what someone else has done and you can go, ah do you know what that is a great way of approaching that particular activity or that particular skill, I'm going to try and do something similar when I come to do that kind of thing next time around. So, you know, it's learning from each other in terms of kind of knowledge but also how you go about kind of doing history.

Karen Foley:

It sounds really exciting Richard, all the best with the module.

Richard Marsden:

Thank you, Karen.

Karen Foley:

Finally, and also at Level 3 we have A344, Art and its Global Histories. Warren Carter filled me in.

Warren, tell us about Art and its Global History. What is the module all about?

Warren Carter:

The module starts from 1350 and runs to the present day. And essentially it's looking at the latest methodological challenge to the subject, i.e. post-colonialism. And that is a

critique of the Western canon and the way that art history is largely dealt with objects made, exhibited and distributed within Europe.

So it's looking at how that particular canon of objects or that assortment of objects were a product of unequal relationships between Europe and the rest of the world through the age of exploration, through colonialism, imperialism up to the present and globalisation.

Karen Foley:

So that's the historical aspect and tell us about the art. I mean what sort of objects or artefacts are students going to encounter on this module?

Warren Carter:

Everything. Ranging from 1350 through to the present. There's obviously high art with the painting, sculpture and architecture but also visual culture more generally. Maps are very important for a course dealing with global art history as well as things like wallpaper which reflect chinoiserie in the way that aristocrats in England in the 18th century used wallpaper sourced from other places. Also things like crockery, Delftware, etc.

So it really is everything that comes in to this course. It's a course which represents not just high art but material culture more generally.

Karen Foley:

I mean one of the examples I know that you are doing in the course is a shawl. I mean what sort of thing would a shawl tell us about, you know, the historical aspects surrounding it as an artefact?

Warren Carter:

Well that relates to Block 3. And it's looking at how these particular shawls were being made in India and then during the period of the British Empire the techniques for making a shawl were then taken back home to Paisley, the Paisley pattern. And they were made more intensely there and then they were exported back in to India. So it's looking at how under colonialism and imperialism certain things were appropriated, manufactured elsewhere. And it changes the whole dynamic of production in the original country that was colonised.

Karen Foley:

Now this module is obviously going to be studied by students who are passionate about art history but it's got a broader appeal.

Warren Carter:

Very much so. First of all it's geography. The history of art and its global histories means about things moving around the world and particular power relation underpin those movements. But also generally history. If you're interested in history this is a course which through the prism of art, visual culture seeks to unpack the historical dynamics and power relations that are changing constantly from the mid-14th century through to the present.

Karen Foley:

And it sounds like a really exciting module. What makes it special for you?

Warren Carter:

Well I started teaching over 20 years ago and, as with a lot of my peers, the first thing we did when we first starting teaching History of Art was go out and buy the Open University third level art history textbooks. And they've always been absolutely amazing. And I've done that ever since. And now I'm chairing a course and responsible for producing a third level course with my colleagues. So it's very, very exciting and I still pinch myself when I think about it.

Karen Foley:

I'm sure the students will enjoy it also. Warren Carter thank you so much.

And that's all we have time for in this addition. If you'd like to find out more about these modules have a look online on the OU's website. There's also a series of videos that you can watch about each new module and these are on Catch Up on the student hub live website, studenthublive.open.ac.uk

Remember to connect with the Faculty of Arts & Social Science is also on Facebook and Twitter.

Bye for now and thanks for listening.